

Teenagers Response To Homelessness: Needs In Iowa

Office of the State Coordinator for
Homeless Education

Iowa Department of Education

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Homeless Education Website

http://www.state.ia.us/educate/ecese/is/homeless/doc/teen_repsonse.pdf

Focus on Status of Homeless Youth In Iowa who are Runaways and Throwaways

- Youth under the age of 18.

Reason For The Study

Concerns expressed by service providers regarding runaways and throwaways:

- exposed to dangerous situations.
- are being victimized by adults and older teenagers.

Classification Of Runaways (Van der Ploeg and Scholte 1997)

- *Running-to youths*: leave home searching for adventure.
- *Running-from youths*: running away from very disordered families and potential harm.
- *Thrown-out youths*: alienated from their families, family not motivated for youth to return home.
- *Forsaken group*: no longer financially supported by family, feel unwanted/unloved.

Provision of School Programs and Services in Seven Large Iowa Cities

- Proactive in encouraging enrollment and attendance, no parental permission needed.
- Proactive in provision of programs and services, e.g. counseling, case management.
- Major problems: transportation, especially for teen mothers and child care for children.

Provision of Emergency Shelter

- Emergency shelter needs are not being met.
- Providers proactive in willingness to serve and did serve youth for one or two nights.
- Unable to serve youth under 18 because parental permission or court order was not available.

Provision of Transitional Housing

- Transitional housing needs are not being met.
- Providers proactive in willingness to serve.
- Two issues arise,
 - (1) lack of parental permission and
 - (2) no court ordered placement. Even if parental permission is available, if there is no court order the question arises "Who will pay?"

Provision of Permanent Housing

- Permanent housing needs are not being met.
- Two issues arise,
 - (1) lack of parental permission and
 - (2) Even if parental permission is available, the question arises
 - "Who will pay?"
- Even if the youth has means to pay, landlords are reluctant to rent to youth under 18.

Provision of Other Services

- Communities reach out to provide some services, e.g. food, clothing, temporary shelter.
- Difficult for homeless youth to access service, such as health and mental health services, without parental permission.

Living Arrangement Option 1: Stability in time (in months) where basic needs for shelter, food, clothing, safety, and security are met in a licensed care facility or a government sponsored care facility

- Option 1 best meets the needs of homeless youth and offers the most protection from dangers encountered while homeless.
- Do homeless youth select Option 1?
- *Very Seldom.*

Comments By Homeless Youth As To Why They Don't Choose Option 1

- I want to be independent and manage on my own
- I don't want a foster home.
- There needs to be a place to go where they don't call parents or authorities.
- Risk of being put in a group home or ward of state.
- I would rather go out on the streets than go home, because I was the one that got abused the worse.
- (Barrier: Agencies unable to serve youth under 18 because parental permission or court order was not available)

Comments By Youth and Service Providers Explaining Why Homeless Youth Do Not Want To Or Can't Live At Home

- "I was kicked out at 17."
- "Both of my parents are on drugs, I had to baby sit."
- "Some leave because of dysfunctional families."
- "Most of the kids take it or see abuse until it becomes so bad they report it, this is the worst time for them to go home, they may get killed."
- "My dad's a drug dealer."

Living Arrangement Option 2: Stability in Time (in Months) Where Basic Needs for Shelter, Food, Clothing, Safety, and Security Are Met in Privately Funded Children's Center.

- Children's Centers were authorized by enactment of Senate file 275 in 1999.
- Not required to provide all of the services required by licensed or government programs (Option 1).
- Reduced cost should make residential placement in these centers more accessible.

Why Homeless Youth Don't Choose Option 2?

- They are not available, as of 5/31/2004 only one Children's Center (Quakerdale, Marshalltown, Iowa) has been established.
- Two other Communities are working toward establishing a Children's Center.
- (Even with enough Centers, obtaining parental permission still could be a barrier).

Living Arrangement Option 3: Stability in time (in months) where basic needs for shelter, food, clothing, safety, and security are met by friends or relatives

- Achieved by living with relatives, friends, boyfriend, girlfriend, or independent (rent).
- Most likely external incentives to continue education is not present, youth must be internally motivated to continue-some attend alternative schools.
- Living is likely to be tenuous, fragile, and subject to early termination.

How Many Homeless Youth Choose Option 3 As a Living Arrangement?

- Most runaways and throwaways select option 3 as their living arrangement.
- Most likely services other than shelter, food, clothing, safety, and security are not available or not easily accessible .
- (Parental permission may be needed, e.g. shelter, medical, vision, dental).

Living Arrangement Option 4: Stability in Time (in Months) Where Basic Needs for Shelter, Food, Clothing Are Met, But Exchange of Favors Is Required

- Even more tenuous and fragile than Option 3.
- Fraught with danger as favors are provided or if youth decides to terminate.
- Favors may be sexual services, prostitution, drug-related activities, illegal behaviors.
- Little or no energy to go to school or better themselves.

How Many Homeless Youth Choose Option 4 As a Living Arrangement?

- A 2001-2002 study of Iowa's Homeless Children youth not living with a parent and not living in a court-placed shelter showed that:
 - about 44% were living with relatives
 - about 40% were living with friends and acquaintances. The study did not distinguish which were safe and secure and which were not.

How Many Homeless Youth Choose Option 4 As a Living Arrangement?, continued

- Many runaways and throwaways drift into and out of different living arrangements, as a result many may be subjected to an Option 4 living arrangement.
- Even if only for a short period of time the arrangement could have extensive and lasting consequences.

Comments By Homeless Youth Pertaining to Option 4 Living Arrangement

- When desperate will sleep with someone.
- I stayed with my baby's father, also moved in with a friend, met a guy-engaged-he kicked me out.
- I live with my boyfriend, never been out on the street, I don't feel in danger.
- I stayed with friends, most were using drugs.
- I would steal to get money for my habit.

Living Arrangement Option 5: Instability

- Lacks stability. No incentive to continue education.
- Extremely vulnerable to being victimized.
- Extremely vulnerable to alcohol and drug abuse.
- May be beaten, robbed, threatened, physically or sexually assaulted.
- Pressured to participate in criminal activities.

Comments By Homeless Youth Pertaining to Option 5 Living Arrangement

- I was on the street at 12, using drugs and sleeping with everybody.
- Somebody forced me into prostitution, that's when I got arrested.
- My cousins (who were homeless) got involved with drugs and got beat up, one was raped at 14.
- Dangers of violence, "looks" of others are deceiving, drugs are prevalent.

Recommendations

- Remove barriers that interfere with accessibility to safe programs and services.
- Sufficient availability of appropriate programs and services.
- Establish Children's Centers.
- Establish Crisis Centers.
- Implement a Comprehensive Rehabilitation Program.
- Utilize and expand existing programs to meet housing and other needs.

What Should Crisis Shelters Provide?

- Availability for immediate placement
- Free of barriers that discourage entry
- Provision of basic needs
- Protection from being hurt by adults/youth
- Medical treatment
- Free of unnecessary stressful situations
- Thorough assessment of needs
- Counseling assistance

What Should Crisis Shelters Provide?, continued

- Provide information regarding laws, rules
- Availability of resources to continue education
- Sufficient time to:
 - achieve stabilization
 - conduct assessments to determine those youth who need intervention for their own protection
 - select and transition into subsequent placement

Legal Actions For Consideration

- A legal way for determination of status as emancipated.
- Modify statute regarding harboring runaways
- Statutorily allow for crisis shelters and define when a youth can stay without parental permission or a court order
- Modify the statutes governing existing shelter
- Use mediation to allow minors a voice in placement decisions

Legal Actions For Consideration, continued

- Attend to distinction between parental notification and parental permission.
- Attend to methods of obtaining parental consent to enter safe and secure living arrangements desired by minors
- Attend to informal placements with relatives or other community people without parental consent

Conclusions

- No concerted and coordinated effort within Iowa to resolve problems encountered by homeless youth.
- Minimal effort to remove barriers that keep them from accessing safe and secure living arrangements.

Results and Conclusions of
This Report Are Similar to
Whitbeck and Hoyt (1999)
Study Presented In Their Book
"Nowhere to Grow"

A power point presentation is
on the Homeless Education
Website.